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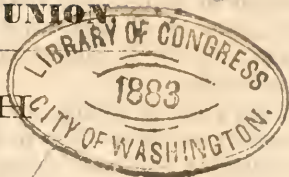






March 3rd 1861

STATE OF THE UNION



SPEECH

OF THE

HON. JOHN H. REAGAN.

OF TEXAS.

2570  
DELIVERED IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, JANUARY 15, 1861.

The House being in the Committee of the Whole on the state of the Union—

Mr. REAGAN said:

Mr. CHAIRMAN: We stand in the presence of great events. When Congress assembled some weeks ago, the control of the condition of the country was in its hands. I came here with a full knowledge of the deep discontent that prevailed in a portion of the States, and I felt then satisfied—as all must be satisfied now—that they intended to insist unconditionally and unalterably upon being secured in their constitutional rights in the Union, or on going out of it for the sake of self-preservation. I came here with the hope that such measures might be brought forward by those who had the power to control this question, as would assure the people of the South that they might expect future security for their rights in the Union. I believe that if the Republican members had manifested, at the beginning of this session of Congress, a purpose to respect simply the constitutional rights of all the States and of their people, all these difficulties might, before this time, have been settled. I do not mean to be understood, in making that remark, as indicating that it would have been necessary for them to have acceded to any extravagant or unreasonable demands. Such demands would not have been made, unless they deem it extravagant and unreasonable to insist upon plain, specific guarantees of those rights which were assuredly secured to us under the present Constitution as it was formed, and which have been secured to us by the action of all departments of the Federal Government down to this time. This, I believe, was the condition of things when Congress assembled at the beginning of this session. In view of the fact that Republican members of Congress have held sullenly back, and have neither proposed nor accepted any com-

promise, but have declared that they have none to make, four States are now out of the Union; and many others are in rapid motion to go out. Unless something can now be done to arrest this movement, there will be but few southern States, if any, acknowledging allegiance to the Federal Government on the 4th of March next.

This state of things having been produced, what can change it? I cannot say now that it is possible to arrest the movement. It is certainly all but impossible now to arrest it. It is my duty to speak on this occasion as I would speak in the presence of the future—as I would speak in the presence of the calamities invoked on this people by the action of this Congress, and by a portion of the States of the Union. No men on the face of the earth, at any period of the world's history, were ever charged with a more solemn responsibility than that which rests to-day on the American Congress. It calls not for passion, but for calm deliberation; not for the maintenance of mere partisan supremacy, but for the ascendancy of patriotism; not for the domination of the one party and the overthrow of the other, but for a constitutional Union based on the action of the people, and on the support of a Government friendly to all its parts; not nurturing and fostering the one and hostile to the other, but just and fair to all alike. These are the great principles which should animate our action if we intend to preserve the Union. On the other hand, if fifteen States come here—minority as they may be in Congress, in the popular masses, in wealth and power—telling you of their discontents, and the cause of them, and if you tender no olive branch, no conciliation, but sternly deny them their constitutional rights, and tender them on the one hand submission to ruin, and on the other powder and ball, who is it that does not know what their decision will be, whatever may be the consequences?

Is there a cause for this discontent? It has been interrogatively suggested that there was none. It has been partially admitted by others that there is some cause. This is no time to come here and suppose that, by special pleading and ingenious statements of the cause of controversy, we can change the judgment of posterity as to the attitude of public affairs in these times. It is beneath the dignity of the statesman; it is beneath the dignity of the men who control events, to resort now to special pleading to misrepresent the cause of the grievances which now exist. History will tell what those causes are. All of you know to-day what they are. For twenty years the anti-slavery strength has been growing in the free States of this Confederacy. In recent years it has become aggressive. The question tendered to the people of the South is well expressed in the language of the President elect—that this agitation must go on until the northern mind shall rest in the belief that slavery is put in a condition of ultimate extinction. That was his sentiment. That is the sentiment of the great leaders of that party. I presume that few members of that party would to-day, in their place, deny that such was its purpose. I take it for granted, that

we may act on the presumption that that is its purpose. What justice is there in that? Let us, for one moment, revert to the history of the Government to know whether it is just in it to assume the responsibility of so grave an act. I need hardly say that, at the date of the Declaration of Independence, each of the thirteen colonies of the Union was slaveholding. At the date of the formation of the Federal Constitution, twelve years after that, twelve of the thirteen States of the Union were slaveholding States. Is it to be presumed that twelve out of thirteen States made a Constitution which was intended to recognize slaves as freemen and equals? It would be asking too much of human credulity to believe such a proposition. If anything were necessary to repel the idea, it is supplied by the bare fact that the convention which framed this Constitution, and gave it to us as the charter of our rights and liberties, provided in it for keeping open the African slave trade for twenty years after the formation of that Constitution, so that the white race might go on under authority of the Constitution and acquire a larger amount of property in negro slaves. The interests of a portion of the States were found not to require African slavery; and these States disposed of their negroes, not so numerous then, it is true, as they were in some of the more southern States. Then they made their States what they call free States. The southern States raised no objection, and had no right to raise any objection, that these States has chosen for themselves to exclude negro slavery; but they had rights under the Federal Constitution—the right to protection and security—which it was their duty to insist upon. That is all they have done.

But, Mr. Chairman, I cannot dwell longer upon this portion of our history; but I will ask attention to another feature of this question. I invoke the attention of Republicans for a moment, to what would be the result of the success of their doctrines if they will not cease this agitation until they can rest in the belief that negro slavery is put in process of extinction. But, before I do it, I wish to make one remark, not altogether connected with my argument, but which may not be unserviceable. We have for years back heard of what is termed the irrepressible conflict. It has emanated from men who have been eulogized for their statesmanship and their learning. It rested on the idea of irrepressible hostility between the interests and institutions of States of the Union. It has been invoked for partisan success and for sectional prejudice. It has culminated too soon for its authors. And here, to-day, behold the fruits of the irrepressible conflict. Every man who looks forward with an eye to the interests and hopes of the country, has foreseen what the irrepressible conflict meant—that it meant subjugation and humiliation to the South, or the dissolution of the Union. You have reached now its logical end. Are you, then, longer prepared to eulogize a doctrine, and eulogize its authors, which has brought upon us so precipitately such fruits as these?

But to the point to which I was calling attention. I ask Repub-



lians to-day—and I would to God I could throw my voice to every city and town and village and hamlet in the whole North, and could be heard by every citizen there, and answered by all—to trace the history of the African race through all the centuries of the past, in every country and every clime, from their native barbarism in Africa to slavery in Brazil and the West Indies, and everywhere else that you find them, and then come to the southern States, and compare the condition of the negroes there with their condition anywhere else, and answer me if they are not in the enjoyment of more peace, more blessings, and everything that gives contentment and happiness, than any other portion of that race, bond or free, at any other age or in any other portion of the world? Will any man deny that they are? And if they are, is it the part of philanthropy to turn them back to the condition of the rest of their race, and, in doing so, destroy the hopes and the social and political future of fifteen States of this Confederacy? Then, again, I would ask this other question: Suppose these slaves were liberated: suppose the people of the South would to-day voluntarily consent to surrender \$3,000,000,000 of slave property, and send their slaves at their own expense into the free States, would you accept them as freemen and citizens in your States? ["No!" "no!" from the Republican side of the House.] You dare not answer me that you would. You would fight us with all the energy and power of your States for twenty years, before you would submit to it. And yet you demand of us to liberate them, to surrender this \$3,000,000,000 of slave property, to dissolve society, to break up social order, to ruin our commercial and political prospects for the future, and still to retain such an element among us.

Again: I ask you, do you believe, one of you—does any Republican in this Union believe this day that, if you could purchase a separate Territory, occupied by no human being, if you could liberate all the slaves to-day, take them to that Territory, frame a government for them, and give them money to start it—do you believe that, for one year, or in any future period, those negroes could maintain a government in peace, giving security to life and person, and prosperity and repose to society? I venture to say there is not a Republican in this Union who would hazard his reputation by answering that question in the affirmative. And yet, in religion's name, in God's name, in the name of justice and humanity, you are invoking every feeling that can stir the hearts of the people to press on with your irrepressible conflict; never halting, never stopping to consider, as all statesmen must consider, the relative condition and capacities of the races; and what is to be the end of the conflict which you invoke, with the certainty, on your part, that it must result in breaking up this Republic, or in the subjugation and the infliction upon the South of the worst despotism that can be forced upon any country. I address you with all the earnestness of my nature; I address you in the name of humanity, in the name of our common country, and of the cause of civil liberty.

Again; if I wanted experience to prove the truth of my suppo-



sition that such would be the calamitous effect of carrying your principles to their ultimate results, the history of the past furnishes that experience. In 1793, when red republicanism assumed its reign in France, and the wild delusion of unrestrained liberty seized upon the minds of the masses, there was a wretched fanatic who undertook to proclaim the equality of every human being, and he proposed the liberation of the slaves in the French West India colonies. The idea chimed in with the popular delusions of the day, and a decree was passed that all the slaves should be free. The colonies would not accept the decree, and did not until the army of France was brought into requisition, and the slaves were set at liberty. But, what was the result to the colonies? Great Britain, catching the contagion from France, determined upon the policy of liberating the slaves in her West India colonies; but she was a little more humane and liberal. She did make compensation to the owners of the slaves liberated, to the amount of, perhaps, one-eighth of their value. But what was the fruit of those decrees to the colonies interested? What was the result of conferring the boon of freedom upon the African race in these colonies? What was the condition of these colonies prior to the execution of these decrees? They were the homes of civilization, contentment, prosperity, and happiness; their farms were cultivated, their cities were alive with business, their ports were covered with the canvass of the fleets of all nations, bearing to and fro the commerce of the world.

Those decrees were passed. What followed? The white race was exterminated by all the implements and modes of cruelty and torture that ingenuity and barbarism could invent. Yes, sir, exterminated. The fields then glowing under the hand of industry soon went back into jungle, inhabited by the wild beasts of the forest; grass grew in the streets of their cities, and ships departed from their ports to return no more. And they have gone on in this experiment of liberty from revolution to revolution, carnage succeeding carnage, until at this time they have relapsed into and present a spectacle of savage African barbarism. Gentlemen of the Republican party, are you now prepared to go on in your aggressions until you have inaugurated the same scenes for your southern brethren? I say your brethren, for hundreds and thousands of them are your common kindred, living in the enjoyment of the blessings of the same system of Government, and enjoying the prosperity common to our people. Are you prepared to inaugurate a system which can only end in such a result? Are you prepared to attempt to force us by fire and sword to submit to such a fate as this?

Your people have lived in the habitual violation of the Constitution and laws of Congress, for many years, to our serious injury, and we have never invoked the doctrine of Federal coercion against your States. Your Legislatures have passed laws nullifying a provision of the Federal Constitution which ought to have secured protection to our rights. The members of your Legislatures had

to commit official perjury in voting for these laws. And your Governors had to do the same thing in signing and approving them. And a number of your States have passed laws to fine and imprison their own citizens if they should aid in executing the fugitive slave law—a law passed in conformity with the requirements of the Federal Constitution, and which has been adjudged to be constitutional and binding on all, by the Supreme Court of the United States.

During all the time your States have stood in open rebellion against the Constitution and laws of the country—and this in carrying out your aggressive and hostile policy against us—we have heard nothing of Federal coercion, not even from our northern friends who are now so ready to turn the Federal bayonets against us. But now that the southern States have determined that they can stand these lawless and hostile aggressions on their rights no longer; now that they have determined not to live under a Government hostile to these rights, and that their safety and self-preservation require of them to resume the powers they had delegated to the Federal Government for their common good, but which are to be used under Republican rule for their ruin, we hear continually from Republicans of the treason and rebellion of the South; and they are loud and seemingly sincere in their demands for the *enforcement of the laws* by Federal guns. And I regret to see that northern Democrats, some of them, seem to be equally forgetful of our wrongs, and of abolition aggressions on our rights, and equally anxious for this gun-powder enforcement of the laws, against the authority of State sovereignty in the exercise of their highest and most sacred duties—the protection and defense of the rights of their own citizen, who can no longer look for security or protection under a Government to be administered by hostile enemies under a violated Constitution.

But again: I wish to call your attention to another point. What is to be the effect upon the material prosperity, not of the South alone, but upon the North, upon Great Britain, and upon the whole of continental Europe, from the success of your policy? Let me ask you to consider—for it would not seem that you have contemplated it for yourselves—this fact: during the last year, the foreign exports from the southern States amounted to \$250,000,000. Of this amount \$200,000,000 consists in the exportation of the single article of cotton. That cotton supplies the material for your northern manufacturers of cotton goods. It employs the millions of capital engaged in that business. It employs the time and services of hundreds of thousands of operatives who work there. It employs the investments made in your northern cities in the shipping in our coastwise trade and foreign commerce. It employs the untold millions of English capital engaged in the manufacture of cotton goods. It employs the millions of English capital engaged in the transportation of cotton, manufactured and unmanufactured. It supplies with bread the hundreds of thousands of operatives employed in the manufacture of these goods in England.



Now, suppose you succeed in striking down African slavery in the United States: you strike down not only our prosperity in the South, and inaugurate instead all the horrors of Africanized barbarism under which the French and British West India colonies now suffer; you strike down all the investments made in the manufacture of cotton goods; you bankrupt your capitalists; you beggar your operatives; you bankrupt Great Britain; you beggar millions there; you inaugurate starvation and famine in Great Britain to an extent ten-fold beyond that which will be suffered here. You require of us unconditional submission; and if that is not rendered, you propose to employ all the force of the Army and Navy to subjugate us.

Mr. CURTIS rose.

Mr. REAGAN. The gentleman from Iowa will excuse me. I do not know of any one to whom I would listen with more pleasure than to the gentleman from Iowa, but my time will not permit me to yield to interruption.

Mr. Curtis. I merely want to put in a general denial to all the propositions the gentleman is stating.

Mr. ASHLEY. I call the gentleman from Iowa to order.

Mr. REAGAN. I was going on to say that you contemplate, as a part of the means of your operations, the blockade of our ports. Well, I grant that you have the ships, and you could blockade our ports if none but ourselves were concerned. But let me warn you in advance, that like a distinguished general of a former war, you will find a fire in the rear as well as in front when you undertake to do it. Your own people will not permit you to do it. Your commercial cities will not permit you to do it. Your manufacturers will not permit you to do it. But suppose your people should be so demented as to allow you to destroy their interests; do you think Great Britain would permit it? Will she permit you to bankrupt her capitalists engaged in the manufacture of cotton goods, and in the commerce growing out of cotton, and to starve her millions of operatives? If your own interests, and all the dictates of humanity and justice, will not induce you to forbear from the madness and folly which must produce such results, Great Britain and continental Europe will promptly require you to raise the blockade of our ports.

Gentlemen, I mention these things, and you can consider them if you think they are worth considering. We are dealing with questions which involve not only our interests, but the interests of all the civilized and commercial world.

You are not content with the vast millions of tribute we pay you annually under the operation of our revenue laws, our navigation laws, your fishing bounties, and by making your people our manufacturers, our merchants, our shippers. You are not satisfied with the vast tribute we pay you to build up your great cities, your railroads, your canals. You are not satisfied with the millions of tribute we have been paying you on account of the balance of exchange which you hold against us. You are not satisfied that we of the



South are almost reduced to the condition of overseers for northern capitalists. You are not satisfied with all this; but you must wage a relentless crusade against our rights and institutions. And now you tender us the inhuman alternative of unconditional submission to Republican rule on abolition principles, and ultimately to free negro equality and a Government of mongrels or a war of races on the one hand, or on the other secession and a bloody and desolating civil war, waged in an attempt by the Federal Government to reduce us to submission to these wrongs. It was the misfortune of Mexico and Central and South America, that they attempted to establish governments of mongrels, to enfranchise Indians and free negroes with all the rights of freemen, and invest them, so far as their numbers went, with the control of those governments. It was a failure there; it would be a failure here. It has given them an uninterrupted reign of revolution and anarchy there; it would do the same thing here. Our own Government succeeded because none but the white race, who are capable of self-government, were enfranchised with the rights of freemen. The *irrepressible conflict* propounded by abolitionism has produced now its legitimate fruits—disunion. Free negro equality, which is its ultimate object, would make us re-enact the scenes of revolution and anarchy we have so long witnessed and deplored in the American Government to the south of us.

We do not intend that you shall reduce us to such a condition. But I can tell you what your folly and injustice will compel us to do. It will compel us to be free from your domination, and more self-reliant than we have been. It will compel us to assert and maintain our separate independence. It will compel us to manufacture for ourselves, to build up our own commerce, our own great cities, our own railroads and canals; and to use the tribute money we now pay you for these things for the support of a government which will be friendly to all our interests, hostile to none of them. Let me tell you to beware lest your abolitionism and *irrepressible-conflict* statesmanship produce these results to us, and calamities to you of which you dream not now.

The question again recurs, what has brought about the perilous condition of the country? Why, sir, to hear the taunts that are made to the South; to hear the epithets of "treason," "rebellion," "revolt;" to hear the declarations and pretensions made in the North, one would think that the people of the South were a reckless, wayward people, seeking only to do wrong. How? In what? Let the question be echoed and re-echoed all over the Union—all over the civilized world. How? In what have the South done wrong? Have they sought to violate the Federal Constitution? Have they sought to violate the laws? Have they asked you to sacrifice any material interest? Have they asked you to sacrifice any principle that is not in conflict with the Federal Constitution and laws? I wish this question could go everywhere and sink into every heart, and be answered by every human being. How have we done wrong? In what have we wronged you? History is to

answer the question; and it is to answer it in the face of the consequences which must follow.

I stand here to-day to say that if there be a southern State, or a southern man even, who would demand, as a condition for remaining in this Union, anything beyond the clearly specified guarantees of the Constitution of the United States as they are, I do not know of it. I can speak for my own State. I think I have had intimate association enough with her people to declare that they have never dreamed of asking more than their constitutional rights. They are, however, unalterably determined never to submit to less than their constitutional rights; never, never, sir! You can rely upon that, Mr. Chairman.

I know, sir, that we have been in the habit of listening to each other under the impression that speeches here were made alone for political effect.

[A man in the gallery here disturbed the House by loud talking.]

The CHAIRMAN. If the disorder in the gallery be repeated, the Chair will call the Speaker to his place, in order that the disorderly person or persons may be ejected. (Cries of "Put him out!")

The Doorkeeper then ejected the person who had created the disorder.

Mr. REAGAN. Mr. Chairman, I was going on to say that we demand nothing but what were our clear constitutional rights. We will submit, sir, to nothing less. We ask no concessions as a mere favor to us. We demand our constitutional rights. That, sir, is the language of freedom. We demand them, and we intend to have them, in the Union or out of it.

I regret that in the course of this discussion an assumption is made, and arguments are predicated upon it, that it was simply a question whether we have the right to rebel against the Federal Government. Those arguments have seemed to go upon the hypothesis that we neither knew nor appreciated the blessings of this Union; but, on the contrary, we hated and wished to destroy it. And here I must say that, on yesterday, I was deeply pained to hear certain arguments advanced by the distinguished gentlemen from Illinois and Ohio, [Messrs. McCLELLAND and COX.] Their arguments seemed to proceed upon the assumption I have stated. I was the more pained, sir, because I have seen the gallant battles they have fought against the abolitionists and the "irrepressible conflict." I know their experience, their judgment, and their capacity. I know, sir, that they are representative men of a great and gallant party. I felt profound regret to see such arguments, proceeding upon such an assumption, come from those gentlemen.

Now, Mr. Chairman, if I can I will correct some of the errors upon which the arguments advanced against us seem predicated. We do rightly estimate the value of the Union. We do rightly estimate the value of the blessings of this Government. We have loved and cherished the Union. Nobody has a better right than I have, although I say so myself, to make that declaration. I have



loved the Union with an almost extravagant devotion. I have fought its battles whenever they were to be fought in my section of the country. I have met every sectional issue, at home in my section, and in my State particularly, which was attempted to be forced upon the public mind, and which I thought would mar the harmony of the Democratic party. I have fought the battles of the Union without looking forward to the consequences. I have fought them in times when the result for the Union seemed hopeless. If I could believe we could have security for our rights within the Union, I would go home and fight the battles of the Union in the future with the same earnestness and energy that I have done in times past.

While those gentlemen tender us war as the alternative, if we do not submit, yet, sir, not one word is said in the way of rebuke to those of the Republican party who have created the present storm; no demand is made of the Republican party to relinquish their unconstitutional encroachments—to give up pretensions inconsistent with our system of government and our political rights. There, appeal ought to be made, that our rights should be given to us, and that we should be secured in the enjoyment of them. Let that be done, and no arm and no voice will be raised against the Federal Union. Deny us our rights, and we will face your messengers of death, and show you how freemen can die, or living, how they can maintain their rights. Mark that, sir?

Where, Mr. Chairman, is now our hope for conciliation? Pennsylvania and Vermont have already acted on the proposition to repeal their personal liberty bills, and they have refused to repeal those obnoxious and unconstitutional laws. The gentleman from Ohio [Mr. Cox] stated, yesterday, that he thought those laws would be repealed in Ohio.

Mr. HALE. There are no personal liberty laws upon the statute-books of Pennsylvania. I know the statement has been made, but it has been corrected time and again.

Mr. REAGAN. I refer the gentleman to his own statute-books.

Mr. MORRILL. Let me say a word for Vermont.

Mr. REAGAN. I cannot allow myself to be interrupted constantly.

Mr. MORRILL. I desire to correct a statement that the gentleman has made. I know that he would not willingly misrepresent my State. Vermont, sir, has not refused to repeal her personal liberty bills. The matter was referred to a commission, and when that commission reports, the Legislature will then, I have no doubt, act on the subject.

Mr. REAGAN. They have not repealed the personal liberty bill. That was my statement; and that statement is not denied. I do not believe that they will repeal them in the northern States. It does not lie in the mouths of our northern friends to ask us to believe them until they can promise with certainty that those laws will be repealed. We know that delay is death. We have already experienced some of the fruits of delays.



We want to avert civil war if we can. Yet no effort has been made to give us what, under the Constitution, we ought to have. It is not proposed to give us what will reasonably make the southern people believe that they will have security in the Union. No such proposition can be made and sustained; because, to give us our rights is to disband the Republican party. The existence of that party depends upon violating the Federal Constitution; and in making war upon the institutions of the South. There is now an irrepressible conflict; and either the Federal Government or the Republican party must end. I am not here to palliate or to dodge one of the inevitable dangers that beset us. I am ready, for one, to face them all; and I think that that is the better course for us all to pursue. When we all do that, then we will have a just understanding of our relative positions. You all know that we cannot, and dare not, live in this Union, with our rights denied by the Republican party. Its ascendancy is our destruction; and, sir, its destruction this day is the only salvation for the Union.

I will now, for a moment, refer to the arguments of the distinguished gentlemen from Illinois and Ohio, [Messrs. McCLEARNAND and Cox.] As one member of this House, I want to give them an assurance that the anticipations they entertain, and upon which they base their arguments, can never be realized. I have been taught, from my earliest instruction in the theory and practice of our Government, that this is a Government of consent and agreement, as contradistinguished from a Government of force or a military despotism. It is bound to be one or the other. Which is it? It is a voluntary association of free, republican States, upon terms of equality or it is a military despotism, in which the Federal arm, through its Army and Navy, can subdue the States at will, and force them to submit to any grievance which may emanate from the Federal Government or other States. Which of these positions do my friends intend to assume. Assuming the principle that the Federal Government has the right to bind the States in all things, they go upon the hypothesis that their interests and position will require them to command the outlet to the Gulf of Mexico and the forts upon the coast of Florida. I do not rise for the purpose of denying the right of passage to the Gulf; but I must express my regrets that they talk in advance of cleaving their way to the Gulf by armies with banners, before one man from all that country has ever said that they should have any cause for war. No one has ever intended to deprive them of the benefit of the navigation of the Mississippi. No one intends it to-day; so that if we are trampled upon by force, let me proclaim to them and to the country, that they must place their action upon a different ground, because we intend that they shall never have cause of war upon that account.

Mr. McCLEARNAND. The gentleman seems to refer to my remarks of yesterday.

Mr. REAGAN. The gentleman did not say so yesterday; but he did on a former day of the session.

Mr. McCLERNAND. Never.

A VOICE. It was said by the gentleman from Ohio, [Mr. VALANDIGHAM.]

Mr. REAGAN. All I want to say is that our interest is peace, and our hopes are for peace. War is in opposition to all our interests and our hopes. We want no war; and we intend to give no just cause for war, unless the attempt to separate ourselves peaceably from despotism, and to take care of our rights under a friendly government—and they would be destroyed under a hostile government—is a cause for war. We declare in advance that we will not interfere with your navigation of the Mississippi river. We know that is necessary for you; but we cannot, because there may possibly be some conflict of interest between us, consent to surrender our liberties rather than assume the responsibility of organizing a government which will cover the lower part of that river and the capes of Florida.

The gentleman from Illinois made a statement yesterday, such as I suppose a gallant and heroic man would make, if his proposition was properly predicated. He said they could not submit to the control of the mouth of the Mississippi and the capes of Florida by us; that they would rather perish—perish, he said, with emphasis—than submit to any other Power controlling the Mississippi, and commanding the coast of Florida. If such is the jealousy of the commercial rights only of his own section; if he feels so keen and sensitive a jealousy, what would he think of us if, when our commerce, our homes, our property, our social and political possessions, for all time to come, are imperiled, we should, like trembling dastards, yield our rights? A great heart like his would never expect it; would never exact it. We prefer liberty, and all its consequences, to a temporary peace without honor; and the gentleman will justify us if, under such circumstances, we tell the North, and tell the world that we accept independence, with all its consequences, in preference to base submission, dishonor, and irretrievable ruin. We shall have no cause of war. My section sympathizes with the gentleman from Illinois and his friends. They look upon them as defenders of the Constitution; and it has been my pride on many a stump and in many a place, to eulogize by name the gentleman from Illinois [Mr. McCLERNAND] and the gentleman from Ohio, [Mr. Cox,] with all their associates, for their gallant conduct, their moral courage, their heroic bearing, in standing up against northern fanaticism, and resisting its onward wave to the destruction of the Constitution, the Union, and our rights. Now, what will our people say when these speeches are printed and sent to them, and they see that these gentlemen are the first in this House who say that the assertion of our independence, when we can no longer live in this Government, shall invoke the cannon, the rifle, the sabre, and all the instruments of war? What will they say when they see that these gentlemen, who have long resisted abolitionism, defied its power, and been crushed down by its operations, are the very first to surrender at discretion in the face of the abolition enemy?



Mr. McCLERNAND. I belong to a particular association—a great party—that occupies a distinct ground in this controversy upon the slavery question. We have been a Union party—a constitutional party—organized against the two extreme parties. We will not succumb to either, but continue to stand by the constitutional guarantees, as we have done in the past.

Mr. REAGAN. I would always have expected from the gentleman such a proposition. I know the gentleman's position well; and what I ask him to consider is, what has brought us to our present condition? If our rights had not been denied us—if our condition had not been imperiled—no voice would have been raised in the South for disunion. Will you compel us to submit to abolition behests? Will you demand that we shall submit to destruction at their hands? I understand the position of those gentlemen; but I ask them to review their words, and determine whether they are prepared to assert to the world and to the American people, that there is no remedy under this form of Government for the grievances, wrongs, and outrages inflicted upon a State; that we shall, under this Government, have no remedy; and that it is in the discretion of the Federal Government to turn against us the cannon and the glittering sabre. Is such the Government under which we live? Is such the Government for which Washington and his compatriots battled? Is such the Government framed by Jefferson and Madison and their associates? No. It is a Government of consent, a Government of agreement, a voluntary Confederation, in which no power was conferred to use force against a State, in order to reduce her to subjection. In the convention which framed it, a proposition of such a character was offered and rejected by the convention; and by the constitution itself, Congress can only exercise the powers specifically delegated to it.

I have but one word more to say. I live far to the South. We have a long Mexican boundary, and a long Indian frontier, infested by hostile savages throughout its whole extent; and yet this Government has refused for years to defend us against them. We have a long coast, open to the approach of a naval force, and we know the consequences of our acts, and we know what may follow an attempt to take care of ourselves and our liberty; but we remember, at the same time, the history of the past. Less than twenty-five years ago Texas stood a province of Mexico, with a population of not more than thirty thousand, entitled to the privileges of Mexican citizens, including all ages and sexes. We lived under the Mexican Constitution of 1824, which the Texans fought to sustain. That Constitution was subverted by a military despot; and our liberties were trampled in the dust. That despot came against us with invading armies for our subjugation. He intended to overawe us by display of military power, as the President and General Scott are now attempting to do with the southern States. The thirty thousand people of Texas resisted that power for the sake of liberty and those rights to which we were entitled, trusting to the God of battles and the justice of their cause. In that great struggle companies and



battalions fell to rise no more. They sank nobly for freedom, as freemen will sink again for her cause whenever you shall tender to us that alternative. Upon the field of San Jacinto they won their liberty by their brave hearts and their stalwart arms. They vindicated that liberty for ten or twelve years after; and then as a pledge of their love to this Union, and their confidence in its principles, and desire for its prosperity and its happiness, that the people tendered Texas, a free and voluntary offering, to come in as one of the States of the Union, upon terms of equality with the other States.

But we were told yesterday that we sold ourselves. The gentleman did not mean exactly what his language would imply; but he must see how offensive such kind of remarks must be to those who do not appreciate the use he intended to make of the argument. Texas cost this Government not one cent. She vindicated her liberty by her arms; and rendered to civil and religious liberty a country as large as the six New England States, and New York, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Ohio, and Indiana, all put together. She redeemed it from Catholic priestcraft, and military despotism, and has covered it over with five hundred thousand freemen, a prosperous and happy people; and they are prepared to vindicate their liberties when they are encroached upon again by a despotism of one or of many men.

It is true, that war grew out of the annexation of Texas; and I suppose it is that with which the gentleman charges Texas. But this government knew what it was doing when it was acquiring dominion over that country, and adding to the United States to aid in building up its commercial, agricultural, and manufacturing interests. But they also acquired New Mexico and Utah, and the great golden State of California, by that war, and extended their power and dominion to the Pacific ocean. And that it was the gentleman from Ohio, [Mr. Cox,] and the friends of those measures, now sneeringly refer to in their reference to the purchase of Texas. I was sorry to hear it.

Allusion has also been made to the fact that \$10,000,000 were subsequently paid for a portion of the domain of Texas, to some of which, it is said, she had no title. I have no time to enter into an argument upon that question. The Federal Government took up our quarrel for that boundary. As our agent, she obtained the title deed for us. No lawyer will say that it lay with her to dispute our title. She then offered us \$10,000,000 for a part of this land—eighty or a hundred thousand square miles of it. Texas accepted the offer. Shall the representatives of the Federal Government now taunt us with the statement that Texas has been bought for a price and paid for? Why, this government only bought a portion of Texas. She has that now. It is not in the jurisdiction of Texas. This Government proposed the trade. Texas assented to it. Was there anything in this to call for contemptuous taunts? We made no sale to this Government of what is now Texas. But Texas did give to this Government, freely and voluntarily, her sovereignty and the dominion of all her vast and fertile domain, and ought to

be exempt from the contemptuous charge of having been bought. It is wholly untrue, and self-respect should prevent the making of such a charge.

Mr. Chairman, there are other subjects which I had hoped to discuss this morning, but I will not trespass on the patience of the House by discussing them now. I have to say in the end, that yet, almost hopeless as it seems, I would be glad to see an effort made towards conciliation. Above all things I stand here to invoke members to look upon this question as one which involves the interests and destiny of States; to warn them that they are making advances against fifteen States, with thirteen million people, and with more than two-thirds of the exports of the country; against a people who understand all these questions, and who are not to be misled or deceived by special pleading; a people who never intended or wished to raise their voice against the Federal Government, and who never would have done so if they had been let alone. Remember that we only ask you to let us alone—nothing else. Give us security in the Union. Respect our rights in the common Territories. So act among yourselves as to let us know that we need no longer live under continual fear of the consequences of your action.

I must say that the very State from which I came, the very district which I represent, has had some painful experience during the last summer, growing out of the doctrines of abolitionism. We found, for the last two or three years, that the members of the Methodist Church North, and others, living in Texas, were propagating abolition doctrines there. We warned them not to carry on their schemes of producing disaffection among our negroes; but they persisted, and did not cease until they had organized a society called the "Mystic Red." Under its auspices, the night before the last August election the towns were to be burned and the people murdered. There now lie in ashes near a dozen towns and villages in my district. Four of them were county seats, and two of them the best towns in the district. The poisonings were only arrested by information which came to light before the plan could be carried into execution. The citizens were forced to stand guard for months, so that no man could have passed through the towns between dark and daylight without making himself known. A portion of them paid the penalty of their crimes. Others were driven out of the country. These things had their effect on the public mind. They were the results of abolition teachings; a part of the irrepressible conflict; a part of the legitimate fruits of Republicanism.

[Here the hammer fell.]











WERT  
BOOKBINDING  
Grantville, Pa.  
March - April 1955  
Wentworth, Bound



